

Agriculture Protection Board  
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# VARIEGATED THISTLE

**V**ariegated thistle is a serious weed in Western Australia. It is very competitive and, when established, will eliminate most other plants by shading and by competition for moisture and nutrients.

Variegated thistle is poisonous under certain conditions. It can kill cattle and, to a lesser extent, sheep. The plant becomes more palatable to stock and more toxic when it wilts after being cut, sprayed or disturbed by ploughing.

Variegated thistle was probably introduced to Australia as a medicinal plant before its potential as a weed was realised.

Variegated thistle is a Declared Plant (noxious weed) in Western Australia.

**Description:**

Variegated thistle is

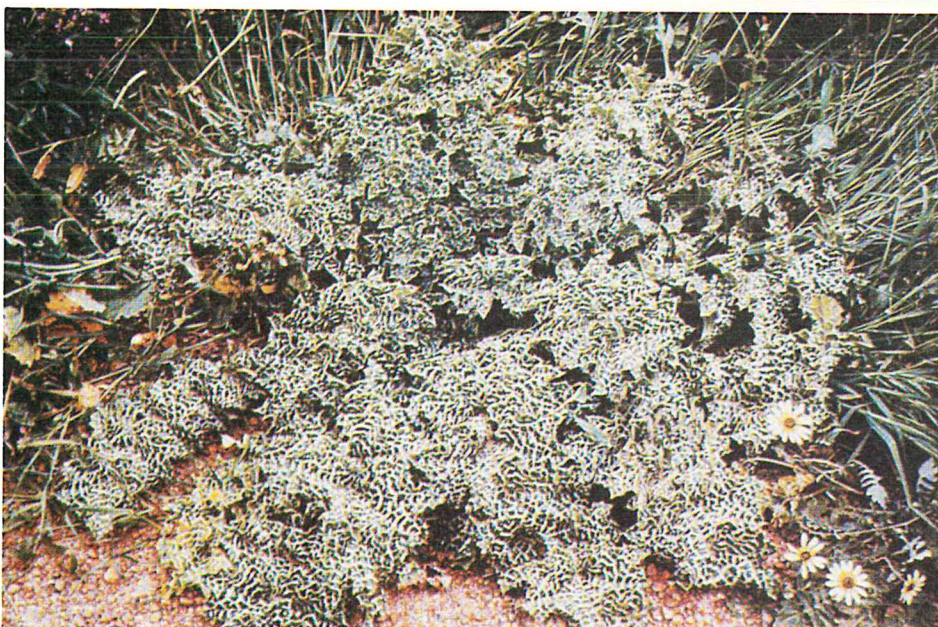
usually an annual plant, but sometimes doesn't flower until the second year. It forms a broad rosette of large shiny variegated green and white leaves. Each lobe on the leaves ends in a thorn.

The rosette is often 50 cm (and can be up to 1 metre) in diameter. A branched central flowering stem up to 3 metres high develops in spring.

Flowering begins in late October and continues into early summer. One large purple flower is produced at the end of each branch. The flowers are surrounded by a circle of spines up to 13 cm in diameter.

Variegated thistle reproduces only from seed. The seeds are either black or brown, about 5 mm long, somewhat flattened with a smooth

*(continued overleaf)*



TOP: Dense thicket of Variegated thistle  
LEFT: rosette. RIGHT: flower.

# **VARIEGATED THISTLE**

*(continued)*

covering. They are equipped with a "parachute" of hairs about 2 cm long.

Seeds are set in summer.

They are too big to be blown far by the wind despite the "parachute", and most seeds fall onto the bare ground at the base of the dead parent

plant.

Variegated thistle seed can remain dormant in the soil for up to nine years. The percentage germination of seed varies from year to year and can be less than 50 per cent. The worst infestations occur in those years when the ground is

bare in autumn, as there is little competition for the weed seedlings. Several germinations of Variegated thistle seed can occur in the one year, which makes control more difficult. Prompt action is essential to eradicate isolated patches of Variegated thistle to prevent the weed

getting established in a new area.

***For information on Variegated thistle control contact the Agriculture Protection Board: Telephone Perth 670111 or any country office of the Agriculture Protection Board or Department of Agriculture.***